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BIRTH

843 The first signs of pregnancy were received with rejoicing by the married couple and their families, who at once began preparing suitable presents for the child. During this period certain restrictions were placed upon the expectant mother and her husband. One of the most important of these prohibited the husband from killing or looking at animals other than the red deer, the flesh of which [825] only his wife was permitted to eat. If the man killed a deer, he jumped over it twice from right to left and twice from left to right, and then scattered a handful of dust over the animal; otherwise the child would be influenced by the deer. If he killed or looked at other animals, they would cause the child's appearance to be like that of an animal.

843 This restriction is illustrated by the following two tales. Once, 538 the husband of a pregnant woman was trapping beaver and otter. 825 One day the man killed an otter, took it home, and skinned it in the presence of his wife, so that the woman saw all that he did. When she gave birth, the child was part otter and part human, and died soon after. At another time a man went hunting during his wife's pregnancy. He found a badger, shot it through the eye, and took the skin home, showing it to his wife and relating the circumstances of how he got it. Though she tried to prevent his telling about it and tried not to see the skin, her child was born blind.

843 During pregnancy the wife was forbidden the use of any form of knife in the preparation and cutting of food, for to do so would sever the umbilical cord and cause the child to bleed to death. The husband was also careful in the care of his ponies and kept [825] away from those that were lariated. Should he become entangled in the lariat the child would be strangled or injured in the delivery. [4] A pregnant woman refrained from drinking with a horn spoon or from a small earthenware vessel which was used as a dipper, as she would drink in the sound supposed to reside in the utensil. The [826] noise would enter the embryo's ears and the child would be born deaf. In other words, practically all forms of congenital deformity 843 were ascribed to the violation of restrictions imposed during preg- 538 nancy. Even twins were supposed to owe their origin to the fact [845] that in ancient mythological times a woman seduced a man, he believing her to be a woman of whom he was very fond. When they had lain together in the timber beyond the village, she jumped up and laughed at him. In her shadow he saw her ears move and looking closer saw a deer running away. The man in vain tried to

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mother's hair, while the husband also braided his. If the midwife's services were no longer required she was given a gift, usually consisting of a bowl of corn, dried pumpkins, and perhaps a parfleche of meat.

Should a woman die in childbirth or shortly thereafter, the death was generally ascribed to the violation on the woman's part of one of the taboos, especially the drinking of water, which was prohibited from the first labor pains until four days after delivery. Children were never killed in case the mother died in childbirth. Infanticide seems not to have been practiced by the Skidi, and in fact all inquiries upon this point elicited astonishment that such a thing could be imagined possible. If the mother had died while giving birth, the child was taken care of by its grandmothers, generally the maternal grandmother.

Stillbirth was also considered to be the result of the mother's infraction of some rule restricting her conduct during pregnancy. In such cases the child was interred in the burial ground of the parents' village, though it was never given a name.

In olden times, at the first signs of pregnancy of the wife, the grandmothers notified the wife's relatives to prepare an elm baby-board and the husband's a board of cottonwood. After the child had been born and was about to be laid on the baby-board for the first time, a wildcat's skin was placed on the board and the child wrapped in clothing and put upon the skin. The midwife said: "I place you upon this board; (if a boy) you shall grow up to make many meat offerings to the gods; (if a girl) you shall grow up to increase, so that your children will do many things for the gods." The wildcat's skin was then wrapped around the child. This was equivalent to saying, "I wrap the child with the heavens," for the hide represented the sky and stars. At the time of this little ceremony the lodge was filled with both father's and mother's relatives, who had brought with them robes, ear-rings, and other presents of all sorts for the child. Friends were also happy over the birth and came, bringing additional gifts. The young couple was especially pleased if the old women took the baby in their arms, for they believed it would increase the child's chance of reaching old age and being blessed with offspring. A few days later, the gifts brought by friends and relatives were given away, usually to poor women who had had many children and grandchildren. Thus the parents expressed their own desire for sons and daughters.

Although the Skidi medicine-men claimed to be able to cause abortion by the use of roots, it was not attempted by married